

## TESTIMONY OF

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Good morning and thank you, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and all members of the Committee for the invitation to testify before you on the urgent and growing need for increased federal investment in water infrastructure.

My name is Kishia Powell, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of DC Water, which is responsible for providing essential drinking water and wastewater services to over 672,000 residents, schools and businesses across Washington, DC, and wastewater treatment service for 1.6 million people in the neighboring counties of Maryland and Virginia.

I also serve as Vice President of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, or NACWA, and I am honored to testify on behalf of NACWA and more than 330 public clean water utilities we represent nationwide who like DC Water continued to serve our communities on the frontlines throughout the pandemic.

### ***Advocacy for Higher Levels of Federal Funding***

For over 50 years, NACWA has represented publicly owned clean water utilities whose mission is to ensure that the communities they serve have access to safe, reliable, and affordable clean water services, while also ensuring the highest level of public health and environmental protections.

As part of that mission, NACWA has long advocated for the federal government to recommit to a full and long-term partnership with local communities to invest in, and build, critical water infrastructure. I bring a clear message and request today – now, more than ever, the nation’s public clean water utilities need a significant increase in federal clean water investment.

The current federal share of water infrastructure funding nationwide is less than 5%, leaving our ratepayers to cover 95% of the financial burden. In my time as a Public Works Director, I recall finding it unacceptable that we could fill potholes with a 20% local match to 80% in grant funding, but we were forced to take out an emergency loan to address a public health issue when the lead action level was exceeded.

Public clean water utilities are at a tipping point. Already faced with the challenge of maintaining and replacing aging infrastructure, grappling with the impacts of climate change on our most vulnerable communities, and spending billions to meet our compliance obligations; the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the financial strain for many clean water utilities as arrearages have grown to an estimated \$8.7 billion in revenue losses.

Against this backdrop, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates a needed investment of \$750 billion over the next 20 years to maintain the nation's drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. Yet, without the necessary federal funding to close the gap; communities across the country will continue to face rate increases that disproportionately impact our most vulnerable communities.

Like DC Water, most utilities have raised rates for years to meet the compliance obligations of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) and the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). It must be recognized that if it is important for the federal government to regulate, it is equally important to provide funding to meet these increasingly stringent requirements, for the burden from this disparity is often borne by households of color and contributes to an increasingly acute environmental justice challenge.

### ***Cleaner Rivers and Higher Rates***

For several years, DC Water has been at the forefront of meeting these challenges. Even as the income gap among our ratepayers widens, we are still investing in needed upgrades to our aging infrastructure to achieve intergenerational equity, and to meet our clean water consent decree compliance obligations.

At the heart of these efforts is the Authority's Clean Rivers Program, an ongoing effort to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) to the District's waterways. DC Clean Rivers is a \$2.7 billion infrastructure program designed to capture and clean wastewater during rainfalls before it ever reaches local waterways. The program's

investments on track to deliver 96% reduction in system-wide combined sewer overflow volume, one million pounds of nitrogen reduction to the Chesapeake Bay, and an economic impact of 41,850 jobs (direct, indirect, and induced) over the life of the program, just to highlight a few benefits.

### ***Funding Needs***

NACWA believes that increased funding for key existing federal programs like the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants, and WIFIA, is critically important. NACWA calls on Congress to provide a substantial amount of funding for the water sector – at least on par with other essential infrastructure sectors – in any upcoming infrastructure package, and to make more funding available as grants.

NACWA also urges establishment of a permanent federal Low Income Water Assistance Program (LIWAP) to aid vulnerable households in paying for water and wastewater services more affordably. We appreciate the initial funding of this program through the COVID-19 relief packages, but more must be done to ensure that grandmothers on a fixed income, single parent households struggling to make ends meet, or the family who has now seen a recent job loss due to the pandemic are not forced to choose between safe drinking water and clean water services or staying in their home.

### ***Closing***

As our country looks to rebound from the pandemic, put people to work and build stronger, healthier communities, NACWA calls on Congress to make a strong commitment to reinvesting in water infrastructure. Congress has an opportunity to turn a generational problem into a multi-generational solution.

This concludes my testimony, and I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.